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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5330  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3635  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5255  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0116  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0790  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4377  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9791  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7082  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0111  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3947  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 001165

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: EASTERN PROVINCE: RETURNS NEARLY COMPLETE BUT  
REINTEGRATION SLOW; SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS FRAGILE

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA A. BUTENIS. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Emboffs met with local authorities, community leaders, United Nations (UN) officials, and returnees in Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts in the Eastern Province.

Returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to these districts are nearly complete but land issues, livelihoods, housing, restrictions on freedom of movement, lack of services, demining, and humanitarian space pose continuing challenges to reintegration. Interlocutors reported a fragile improvement in general security conditions, and but serious human rights violations continue and generalized anxiety remains. END SUMMARY.

VISIT TO EASTERN PROVINCE  
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12. (C) Embassy officers visited Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts in the Eastern Province from December 13-16, 2009. In Batticaloa, officers met with Government Agent S. Arumainayagam, Mayor Sivageetha Prabhakaran, United National Party (UNP) Provincial Council member T.A. Masilamani, UN officials, a Catholic Bishop, the president of the local NGO Consortium and people who had returned from displacement. In Trincomalee, officers met with Governor of the Eastern Province, Rear Admiral Mohan Wijewickrema; Government Agent and District Secretary, Major General T.R.R. de Silva; Chief Minister Sivanesethurai Chandrakanthan (a.k.a. Pillayan); UNHCR, local human rights groups, and returned IDPs.

MULTIPLE WAVES OF DISPLACEMENT  
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13. (SBU) While the international community is currently focused on displacement in the North, the Eastern Province has experienced multiple waves of displacement and returns over the last 20 years. Sri Lankans originating from the

East were displaced both within the province and into the Vanni. IDPs within the Eastern Province were displaced, sometimes multiple times, by conflict in the 1990s, by GSL military operations as they captured LTTE-controlled areas during 2006/2007 and by the May 2007 establishment of a High Security Zone (HSZ) in Sampoor/ Muthur East. IDPs displaced from the East to the Vanni were caught up in the violence there and then trapped in closed camps. Some had moved to the Vanni to marry northerners or for economic opportunity, others had gone there intending a short family visit or business trip. Some of those who developed ties to the Vanni came to the East as a way to escape closed camps and are considering going back to the Vanni once conditions there allow it.

#### RETURNS NEARLY COMPLETE

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14. (U) According to UNHCR, returns within the Eastern Province have been ongoing since late 2006 and had recently picked up pace with returns from the Vanni. Camps are rapidly emptying, but significant numbers remain displaced with host families or other temporary locations. Over the past three years, Batticaloa has seen 123,907 returns from within the district, and 2,788 returns from the Vanni. As of mid-November, the GSL reported just 825 people remaining in displacement with host families. Over the same time period, Trincomalee experienced significant returns within the district, 21,401 returns from Batticaloa, 9,364 from the Vanni (including 2,256 special needs cases released to host families), and 5,834 returns from India. An estimated 7,150 people remained displaced with host families or in transit sites as of December 14.

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15. (SBU) The largest remaining camp, Killeveti, in Muthur division, is slated for a returns operation of 600 of 817 remaining families in the imminent future. Killeveti is largely made up of persons displaced by the Sampur HSZ. The HSZ was re-designated as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and will contain two coal plants. The zoned area was reduced from eleven to four Grama Niladari divisions (villages), but still left many without a home. IDPs from the restricted area had proposed nearby sites for relocation after rejecting those assigned by the GSL, reportedly due to unwillingness to live next to a particular caste. Others had accepted relocation, and some had permits to cultivate specific land plots within the SEZ. The GSL has stated its intention to compensate those who lost land to the SEZ but has not provided details to UNHCR on how to seek such compensation. Many original inhabitants have lived on the land for centuries without deeds and would likely be ineligible.

#### CHALLENGES TO REINTEGRATION CONTINUE

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16. (SBU) Land, livelihoods, and shelter are universally identified as top priorities for returnees. Those with proper documentation have largely been able to regain their land, but many still rely on family for support. New households are seeking new land. One IDP returnee explained that she and her eleven siblings and their spouses had to divide up their fathers' land, leaving insufficient paddy space for each household to maintain itself. Many returnees relied on land permits during displacement and did not own land to which to return. Some have been assigned land by local authorities. Others are squatting in abandoned homes. One female IDP woman had moved with her ailing parents and daughter from house to house and was told by the owner of her current house that they must leave when he returned in January. Land ownership is crucial to cultivation, which most returnees rely on for income. While some land was available for lease, IDPs reported that a lack of start-up funds keep them from obtaining enough land to make a profit. Some returnees work as day laborers, but the cost of

transport to worksites was half their daily pay. Access to fishing areas has improved in recent months. Recent returnees qualified for temporary shelter from UNHCR, and some had received permanent houses through the North East Housing Reconstruction Programme (NEHRP), but others identified housing as an urgent need.

¶17. (SBU) Restrictions on freedom of movement also impact livelihoods. In some areas, registration is required to leave the district, in others everyone is required to register on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, thus limiting travel for work. Even where formal restrictions are not in place, fear creates self-imposed limitations. One returnee commented that every Tamil family has at least one educated person, but they were too afraid of being picked up by security forces to seek work in towns. Vanni returnees were held under particular suspicion of LTTE association. Civil documentation such as national identity cards, birth certificates (required for school enrollment), death certificates and marriage certificates are difficult to access.

¶18. (SBU) Lack of services is discouraging returns and drew people to urban centers, away from rural points of origin. For example, Poloff spoke to Sinhalese returnees cultivating their fields in Namalwatte, while their families remained in Kantale, the site of their displacement two hours away. They expressed interest in moving home if they had permanent housing, health facilities, and schools. Some Nochichikulam

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returnees reportedly left for Trincomalee so their children could attend upper-level schools. Interlocutors highlighted the need for livelihood assistance for "widows" who lost their husbands to violence or detention camps. Proposed livelihood projects include poultry farming, sewing, weaving textiles, and home gardens.

¶19. (SBU) Incomplete demining impedes returns and creates an ongoing risk. Some areas in Chenkalady and Kiran have not yet been demined. As international attention and funding moved to the North, so too did demining NGOs and Sri Lankan Army demining units. There is a need to clear agricultural, as well as residential land. If returnees go to uncertified areas, they risk mine incidents, and humanitarian actors cannot access them.

¶10. (C) Humanitarian space in Eastern returns areas remains a challenge as different GSL elected and appointed officials angle for control and resources. UN actors are able to operate fairly well as long as they coordinate closely with local authorities. International NGOs face more oversight and severe limits on international staff. The Government Agent in Trincomalee, in particular, demands detailed information on all projects and is viewed as a bullying micromanager. In his view, his involvement is required to ensure that internationals did not waste funds or spend it all on Tamils. The Chief Minister, on the other hand, urged that all funds be channeled through his office so that they did not all go to Sinhalese. Protection work has received the most scrutiny, and organizations which had incorporated protection into other sectors such as shelter met the least restrictions.

#### IMPROVEMENT IN SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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¶11. (SBU) Interlocutors universally reported fragile improvement in security conditions but stressed that serious human rights violations continue, and normalization has not yet been achieved. UN actors emphasized rule of law and access to justice as essential parts of early recovery and development, which should not be overshadowed by infrastructure and livelihoods projects.

¶12. (C) There reportedly are fewer checkpoints on the main

roads, though not in the interior. Travel to certain returns areas, such as military-controlled Kiran, still requires permission from the local commander. Police are increasingly taking charge in towns, but the military maintains its strong presence in rural areas. UN actors reported that police had "some positive attitude" but lacked confidence. On the other hand, a group of Sinhalese returnees perceived the military as disciplined and the police as corrupt. Since last year, 500 Tamils and Muslims have been recruited for police training school to increase the force's Tamil-speaking capacity. They have been dispersed to Colombo, the North, and the East. Security improvements have improved access to livelihoods -- locals are reportedly more willing to travel into the interior to cultivate and to fish at night. Handover of military-occupied buildings to civilians has increased, though many citizens remain displaced by troops. In Batticaloa, 350 private properties are still occupied by the military. Police and the Criminal Investigation Unit (CID) still conduct home searches, particularly of returnees.

¶13. (C) Serious incidents such as abductions and killings has decreased, but numbers remained alarming. In 2008, UNHCR verified 85 abductions and 61 killings reported in Trincomalee. In 2009, UNHCR verified 33 abductions and 42 killings as of mid-December. The Catholic Bishop cited 60

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reports of disappearances since the war ended in May. A local women's group has recorded 120 disappearances over the past 10 months. The Tamil Makkai Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), security forces and Special Task Force (STF) are identified as likely responsible. In addition to being gross violations of human rights, these incidents leave families traumatized and without a source of income. Sexual and gender-based violence is an increasing concern, and UNHCR is developing a program to improve local GSL response capacity.

¶14. (C) Despite overall improvements, generalized anxiety remains palpable. Vanni returnees fear they will be detained or arrested for alleged LTTE ties, despite having undergone screening. The Catholic Bishop implored embassies not to reveal him as a contact. The UNP Provincial Council member has recently moved to a rented home because he fears for his life. His son had been stopped on the street and told to tell his father to pack up and leave Batticaloa. Returnees were reluctant to speak openly with Poloff. Families also remain anxious about their relatives in detention. One returnee thanked the U.S. for its role in securing his release from camp but called on President Obama, in particular, to push for release of detainees.

COMMENT

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¶15. (C) As we look to IDP return issues in the North, lessons can be learned from the East. The eastern experience demonstrates that returning people to their points of origin is only a first step, and that the reintegration process requires the political will, and funding to provide for access to justice, land, livelihoods, and services. The international community should continue to advocate for increased freedom of movement, access to civil documents and demilitarization of the East and the North. Continued international attention is needed to accelerate and maintain recent improvements in security. Funding should continue for development projects that support successful long-term reintegration of the displaced populations into their original communities.

BUTENIS